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Title Page

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Negro and White Exclusion Towns and Other Observations in Oklahoma and Indian Territory: Essays by Frank G. Speck from The Southern Workman

by Frank G. Speck

Edited with an Introduction by Jason Baird Jackson

Publications of the Oklahoma Cultures Digital Initiative Number 1

Bloomington, Indiana, USA

2009

For information on the Oklahoma Cultures Digital Initiative, please visit:
<http://digitaloklahoma.net/>

Editor's Introduction: On Frank G. Speck's Oklahoma and Indian Territory Essays for the Southern Workman

This module is the editor's introduction to the collection of essays by Frank G. Speck published under the title *Negro and White Exclusion Towns and Other Observations in Oklahoma and Indian Territory*.

The essays by American anthropologist and folklorist Frank G. Speck (1881-1950) that are gathered in this collection, under the title *Negro and White Exclusion Towns and Other Observations in Oklahoma and Indian Territory*, were first published in *The Southern Workman*, a journal of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, a non-denominational industrial school “for Negroes and Indians” founded in 1868 and located in Hampton, Virginia. The institution is today known as Hampton University and, given its long and distinguished history, it can be seen as a flagship institution among what are known in the United States as the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Among such institutions, it has a distinctive history as a college that also played a key role in American Indian educational history. Because of the involvement of numerous American anthropologists in both progressive social reform and the study of African American and American Indian communities, *The Southern Workman* became a regular venue through which such scholars communicated with interested non-specialist audiences, particularly those Hampton alumni who graduated to become influential members of their own communities.

At the time that that he published the first of these essays--“Observations in Oklahoma and Indian Territory”--Speck was still a young Ph.D. student in anthropology studying under the supervision of Columbia University anthropologist Franz Boas (Blankenship 1991; Jackson 2004, 2005). As is described in greater detail in Jackson (2004), Speck had visited the “Twin Territories” during the summers of 1904 and 1905 in order to pursue the field research that would provide the basis for his doctoral dissertation, an ethnography of the Yuchi (Euchee) people. This study was published in 1909 as *Ethnology of the Yuchi Indians* (Speck 1909a, 2004). Despite his special concern during these summers with the Yuchi, Speck pursued incidental but significant studies among a wide variety of American Indian communities, including the Chickasaw (1907c), Osage (1907d) and

Muscogee (Creek) (1907a). This ethnographic work among the American Indian peoples of present-day Oklahoma is relatively well known to scholars and to interested members of the relevant native communities. The work from this early period in Speck's career that remains much less known are the series of essays that he contributed to *The Southern Workman* (Speck 1907b, 1907e, 1908, 1909b, 1911). While listed in the bibliography compiled by his own student John Witthoft (in Hallowell 1951), these essays have been inaccessible to general readers and have gone largely ignored by scholars.

In contrast to his studious ethnographic and ethnological articles and monographs--which are valuable contributions to Americanist cultural history--Speck's essays in *The Southern Workman* are lively, partisan and sometimes-biting observations on everyday realities in Oklahoma. They were made right at the dramatic and, for native peoples, very destructive moment in which the territories were being transformed into the 46th U.S. state. Oklahoma statehood occurred on November 16, 1907, the same year that saw publication of his essay "Observations." In the *Southern Workman* essays, Speck does not limit himself to American Indian matters but takes in the full social complexity of Oklahoma as it was during his visits. African Americans and European Americans (in all their diversity) are just as much his concern in these essays as are the American Indian peoples whom he traveled cross-country to learn from. As the reflections of a trained social scientist actively seeking to make sense of Oklahoma at the moment of statehood, these brief essays are invaluable. Of course they are written in the language of a turn of the (20th) century scholar and they reflect the broader social and cultural world of which Speck was a part. He, for instance, adopts the language of race while attempting to critique white racism. Like Boas his teacher and like many of his classmates and contemporaries, Speck was part of an effort to systematically use the tools of anthropology to rethink race and to address the problems of prejudice, but this effort was (and is still) a work in progress. In 1907, this part of the Boasian project was still in its early stages. Boas' students had not yet established a stable institutional framework to pursue their work and the conceptual tools that they were fashioning were still in rudimentary form. And, of course, they were people pushing against, but embedded within, the dominant social frameworks of their time.

It is anticipated that a fuller treatment of these essays will eventually become available to scholars, students and other interested readers. Given the brevity of Speck's essays, I will limit my editor's remarks here to observing that almost every issue taken up by Speck in his essay "Observations in Oklahoma and Indian Territory" remains at the center of Oklahoma's contemporary public policy discussions and all are prominent in the complex, and sometimes conflicted, ways that Oklahomans talk about, and experience, life in the state. Authored at the time of statehood, Speck's reflections foreshadow particularly Oklahoman debates about the state's failing bridges and roads, its often very strained inter-ethnic relations, its challenged educational institutions, the constant reappearance of corruption in the financial sector, public health woes, painful epidemics of substance abuse, the problem of "brain drain," and the reality of unswimmable lakes and questionable drinkable water. Like many Oklahomans-by-birth and by-choice, I combine a deep love for the state of Oklahoma with a recognition that it is a special place with both unique merits and distinctive social and environmental problems. Regardless of political orientation, I am confident that any Oklahoman who follows the state's news day to day and year to year will, despite its author's discouraged and provocative tone, find Speck's reflections to be not only a remarkable historical portrait but also a prescient preview of those issues that would continue to vex politicians, policy makers, and all Oklahomans.

Thankfully present-day realities in Oklahoma show significant change from the circumstances described by Speck in "Negro and White Exclusion Towns in Indian Territory and Oklahoma." Yet, the specter of racism and racial violence continues to haunt present-day Oklahoma. Historically-aware Oklahomans reading Speck's account will think immediately of the horrifying and massive Tulsa race riot of 1921, judged by many reasonable observers to be the worst such event in U.S. history. The results of this spree of anti-black violence and destruction are observable everyday by any citizen of Tulsa who cares to wonder about why the city has the built and unbuilt urban landscape that it does. In addition to the countless lives lost, the riot destroyed what was once known as the "Negro wall street" and 35 city blocks of thriving--if segregated--African American neighborhoods. The scars of this destruction are visible on the landscape today and are

internalized in the consciousnesses of many Oklahomans. (For an overview of the Tulsa Race Riot, see Ellsworth 2009)

The Southern Poverty Law Center was aware of (as of this writing) nineteen active hate-groups in the state. Most of these were white racist and neo-Nazi organization, but they also highlighted the presence of Black Separatist groups in the state (Southern Poverty Law Center 2009). While dramatic racist violence is not a daily occurrence, incidents occur at a regular enough rate to form a kind of regular and unwelcome rhythm in the consciousness of those who follow the state's major newspapers with a concerned eye. A more pervasive racial animosity is evident, for instance, in the comments that one can now find appended to many newspaper stories as these now appear online. Thankfully, contemporary Oklahoma is also the home to many people and organizations of goodwill who are devoted to combating racism and other expressions of injustice. The Oklahoma Center for Community and Justice is one such organization that has made a real difference working to bring the peoples of Oklahoma into healthy dialogue. I mention the continuity in Speck's observations on race relations not to besmirch the state but to provide those who are working for its betterment a sense of the historical depth the lurks behind the problems they are addressing (Oklahoma Center for Community and Justice 2009).

The Oklahoma Center for Community and Justice, with its goal of promoting tolerance and inter-community dialogue, is, at its core, an interfaith organization that has promoted cooperation among the adherents of the state's diverse religions. It has been most successful in bridging Christian, Jewish, and Islamic communities, but has struggled to find ways to connect with those--particularly in native communities--who do not practice one of these world religions. Such organizations have also been most successful in cities such as Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and Norman. Such cities are more socially and culturally diverse than the smaller towns and rural areas that comprise the majority of state. These considerations of religious and social diversity together with the dynamics of urban, suburban, and rural settlement bring us to Speck's other essays.

On the surface, "Creek Negroes," "Creek Myths," and "Creek Missions" all seem to relate solely to the complexities and history of the Muscogee

(Creek) Nation, one of the state's many native nations. Strictly, and in terms of specific detail, this is true, but in actuality each of these essays evokes matters that are much more broadly relevant in the history and present-day circumstances of Oklahoma. Speck's account of the Creek Freedmen speaks to the general circumstances these people shared with the Freedmen communities of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and (to a lesser extent) Seminole Nations (Miles and Naylor-Ojurongbe 2004; Sturm and Feldhousen-Giles 2008). The complex and painful cultural, social, economic, political and legal struggles of these Freedmen communities are front page stories in present-day Oklahoma (Feldhousen-Giles 2008).

"Creek Myths" is an overview of the customary verbal art of the Muscogee (Creek) peoples. This oral literary heritage remains important to culturally conservative Muscogee people today and it is a source of inspiration for Muscogee authors and artists (Gouge 2004; Womack 1999). It also points to the cultural sharing that links the Muscogee people to their native and non-native neighbors. Many of the folktales that Speck heard in his travels among the Creek, Yuchi, and Chickasaw are shared not only among the region's native peoples but are also central to the broad African American oral tradition. The stories of the trickster Rabbit are the best known manifestation of this regional and inter-ethnic tradition (Urban and Jackson 2004).

The observations that Speck makes in "Creek Missions" are about the disruptive ramifications of "on again, off again" Christian missionization, but they speak more broadly to the ways that the specific practices of European American colonization of the Creek Nation, whether intended as beneficial or as purposefully exploitive, resulted in manifold negative consequences that the peoples of the Creek Nation, and of Oklahoma more generally, had to struggle to find ways of coping with. Any sensitive observer of the state today would, I think, note that these struggles to find meaning, order, justice, and security are ongoing in a place where people live with not only the memory of, but the everyday effects of, a complicated and very difficult past. (For discussion of Christianity among the Southeastern Indian peoples--including the Muscogee (Creek) in Oklahoma, see Clark 2004.)

The editor hopes that, in making these articles more readily available, they will be of use to scholars concerned with the cultural and social history of Oklahoma as well as of interest to general readers. They should also be relevant to those seeking to understand the life and work of Frank G. Speck specifically and of early American anthropology generally.

This collection is the first title in the series Publications of the Oklahoma Cultures Digital Initiative. For more information on the OCDI, please visit <http://digitaloklahoma.net/>. Because Speck's articles were published in the United States before 1923, they are in the public domain and thus available for republication in this form.

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Observations in Oklahoma and Indian Territory

This module is a republication of the following essay: Frank G. Speck. 1907. Observations in Oklahoma and Indian Territory. *Southern Workman* 36, no. 1: 23-27. Based on ethnographic field research undertaken in the Oklahoma and Indian Territories in 1904 and 1905, Speck's essay describes a range of environmental and social problems faced by the diverse peoples residing in the territories on the eve of Oklahoma statehood. Under U.S. copyright law, this essay is now in the public domain and is being republished on this basis.

Between the Arkansas and the Red River there lies a tract of wonderful country that is in some ways full of promise and wealth and yet in others is a land of disappointment. The fertility of the soil, its extent, and the abundance of moisture from the rivers and creeks make this region one that can scarcely be surpassed for its crops. But many who have gone into it have found it disappointing and are anxious to leave, chiefly on account of local drawbacks which had been overlooked in the first blinding glance at its richness. Such is the great district now comprised within the bounds of Oklahoma and Indian Territory.

Fifteen years ago the whole tract was the hunting ground of the twenty-odd tribes of Indians domiciled there. Now the hunting grounds are limited, the Indians with them, and white promoters of industry and agriculture have entered, paving the way for all that follows. This statement applies more to Oklahoma, but holds in a less degree for its sister territory also. Without going into the statistical field, which is fully treated in the encyclopedias, a few unrecorded and impartial observations might be found interesting to those whose attention has been drawn of late to this part of the United States.

The local obstacles that have discouraged some of the settlers and prospective business operators, are climate, legal restrictions (in Indian Territory), absence of decent roads and bridges and hence the inability to procure a good market for products, and, lastly, the ignorant condition of many of the people. It must be remembered that for many years these territories were the refuge for both white and Negro miscreants all along the border, and this element has left a noticeable impress upon the character of

the present inhabitants. Consequently, in some of the border "tent towns," where the saloon is the principal structure, school and church influences have not yet been able to eradicate all that is undesirable. In such districts, I have found many well-intentioned people, but the niceties of urban life are almost unintelligible to them, and prejudice holds them to old and antiquated devices that would offend an inventive mind. Indeed, to most of the luxuries of farm life they are strangers. In many parts schools have not been operated long enough to have developed a desire for advancement, and of course the large percentage of Negroes and illiterates lowers the general average of intelligence.

An important hindrance to the free circulation of trade is the frightful condition of the roads. No one who has not passed through the timber or prairie areas in a wagon can understand what it means to transport loads of goods over wastes of saturated mud several inches thick. And when, on the other hand, the weather has been very dry the unconquerable dust and sand are about as bad as mud. Even worse conditions exist in the region known as the "cross timber," stretching almost due north and south along the western boundary of the Creek Nation and down into the Choctaw country. This expanse undoubtedly contains much of the richest land of the Southwest. But such roads! Winding now through loamy groves of post oak, then across deep and rocky fords in water that takes the horses to their girths, they finally emerge upon some beautiful but gullied, rutted prairie; such conditions are enough to deter the ranchman from risking his animals and merchandise on roads that lead to a hopeful but uncertain market. These considerations must have been overlooked by the last generation of tradesmen, for in many towns, especially in the Creek Nation, I have noticed vacant store and trade buildings that indicate a former, but now extinct prosperity. There is a suspicious element in the natures of the landholders of the territories, which is shown by their extreme desire to sell out. The redemption of whatever traffic remains, lies now in the construction of highways and bridges that can withstand the impetuosity of the western squall and the inevitable washout accompanying it. I once watched Scull Creek, Indian Territory, rise twenty-five feet in three hours as the result of a storm that raged several miles above. The few bridges erected by spasmodic public effort are seldom capable of surviving such torrents and the idea of repairing them is soon abandoned.

In most parts of the territories a fairly healthy atmosphere prevails, except in the timbered and swampy tracts. Noxious insects are everywhere more abundant than welcome, and venomous snakes are not unknown. The chief hygienic drawbacks are, however, the poor water and the lack of town drainage. It is a fact, although hotly disputed by those who have interests at stake, that the water of at least three-fourths of the entire region is totally unfit for human consumption. Most of it is offensive to both nose and mouth, the physical attestation of which fact is the appearance of those who use it. As to town drainage, I will only state that in the western section of Indian Territory the shallowness of the surface soil makes it impossible to have refuse pits of sufficient depth for decency, and even where this does not hold true the consistency of the turf impedes the drainage of fluids to such an extent that in places a pit will hold water about as well as a vessel. The difficulty is increased by the levelness of the land.

The one alluring feature at present of conditions in the territories is the opportunity to loan money, which is open to any man who has it. Each year just before the cotton picking begins there are plenty of planters who have reached the bottoms of their purses and are anxious and ready to buy cash at the generous rates of usury made possible by the laxity of the laws. This of course holds true principally in Indian Territory, where the Indians are leasing their lands to settlers. Under the regulations now enforced, Indians may not sell their lands, but the freedmen, or Negroes formerly slaves of the Indians, and their descendants, may. So the inter-relations of moneylender, freedman, Indian, and settler become obvious. This class of business is largely handled by the banks, and the traveler thus comes to understand why there are so many prosperous banking houses in Indian Territory. Nearly all the Indians have some dealings with them, chiefly through mortgages and loans.

There has been, however, a great change throughout Indian Territory since the disintegration of the tribes began. This was completed in 1906, so that now the Five Civilized Nations exist only in name. The ancient and inadequate legislation will soon give place to the new, and many disappointed promoters will find their hopes either realized or doomed to further disappointment.

Negro and White Exclusion Towns in Indian Territory and Oklahoma
This module is a republication of the following essay: Frank G. Speck. 1907. Negro and White Exclusion Towns in Indian Territory. *Southern Workman* 36, no. 8: 430-432. Based on ethnographic field research undertaken in Oklahoma and Indian Territories in 1904 and 1905, Speck's essay describes the racial polarization and violence that was unfolding in the territories at the time of Oklahoma statehood. Under U.S. copyright law, this essay is now in the public domain and is being republished on this basis.

Affairs relating to the question of race are apparently rapidly passing from a stage of quietude to one of considerable activity since the recent troubles in army and political circles, occasioned by the misunderstandings that have grown up between the white men and the Negro in the United States. The question has been provoked on all sides by the discussions of men prominent in politics and in the world of thought. Of late even the ranks of the conservatives have been stirred and patent facts of growing significance are challenging the attention of those who have never before given to the public their opinions on the subject. The occurrences that have stimulated public interest in the race question are comparatively recent ones, and in truth they seem to be of the most important nature. But despite the fact that serious clashes between the opposed interests are apparently recent, there has existed for some time back, say ten or twelve years, a threatening state of affairs in the southwestern part of the country. This state of affairs is probably destined to exercise considerable influence on the settlement of the race question, if such a settlement takes place, and it has been gradually assuming vigor and strength, particularly in the Indian Territory and Oklahoma.

It is remarkable that social observers as a rule are generally unacquainted with the conditions referred to. The social intermingling of the three races, white, Indian, and Negro, in the former territories, and their peculiar relations with each other have been accountable for the development of a hostile spirit between the whites and Negroes which has led them to exclude each other from certain towns where either party has strength enough to do so. The towns where white men have forbidden the residence of any Negro whatsoever, and those of the other class wherein Negroes

have in their turn assumed the prerogative of expelling white men who may desire to do business or reside there, are fairly numerous. It would not be a difficult matter today to make out a list of the first class, but owing to the inconspicuous nature and remoteness of some of the Negro settlements of this sort, it would require considerable horseback travel to arrange a list of the latter.

During several seasons in Indian Territory, however, in 1904 and 1905, the importance of the above mentioned racial antagonism was brought to my attention, at first very casually. While waiting at the railroad station at Chandler, Oklahoma, for a late train, a Negro, his belongings wrapped in a bandanna, inquired of me whether Stroud, a large town some distance to the east, was open to Negroes. I replied with some surprise that I did not know, but asked him some questions, and in a short time I learned of the hostile feeling in many parts of the then territories which has given birth to the high-handed expulsive acts committed by both parties. As it proved, Stroud was a newly converted exclusion town and when the train arrived there Sam, who was of a determined nature, decided to learn for himself whether or not he could take the job of waiting in the hotel which had been offered to him. A large crowd of white men filled the station platform and Sam was immediately lost to view in a surrounding mass of inquirers, who were enforcing upon him in various ways the fact that it would not be "healthy" to stay over night there. I noticed, nevertheless, that he stayed. Stroud, as it was later rumored, had only recently turned anti-Negro and I learned that within two weeks the only family of resident Negroes, who persisted in their intention of braving the opposition, had been blown up with dynamite. "No lives lost, but the house demolished and Negroes ousted," was the gist of the newspaper accounts.

The amount of talk circulating in the neighborhood after this "raising," as they called it, let the light in on many other facts relative to the local race question. The neighboring town, where I happened to be, at once began casting side glances on the Negroes who thronged the streets on market days. Were it not for the fact that it lay in Indian Territory where Negro freedman have land rights and the numerical strength to hold their own, the outcome of public excitement might have been the same as at Stroud. Now the question is, in towns where both races still abide in tolerance how long

will the balance be maintained? Feelings of antagonism through pride of character ought really to have little place in some of these villages, for the moral character of the majority of whites is not at all above comparison with that of the poorest Negroes. It is quite evident that the Negroes will not be the first to take aggressive steps, but when united measures are taken by the whites the Negroes will not be slow to respond, either by passive or aggressive opposition. The natural result, even where there is no violent outbreak, is one that nourishes the genius of trouble for the future.

No solution of the matter has as yet suggested itself and the only means so far adopted by those concerned, to better the present state of affairs, has been to ignore it or to treat it lightly. It is quite apparent, however, that things cannot remain very long at a standstill. The Negroes in the region mentioned are watching affairs in other sections and the whites are watching them. A lack of sympathy with the ideals of the nation itself is already manifesting itself among the Negroes, who have nothing to hope for in the way of improvement at the hands of the present local controlling powers. Indeed they see nothing of the well-intentioned efforts on foot for the fair settlement of race differences and they can hardly be blamed for showing apathy to civil institutions which in reality are strongly prejudiced against them. A case which illustrates this unloyal sentiment came up on the Fourth of July, when a brass band was playing martial and rousing airs during the review of some troops near an Indian Territory garrison. Some Negro bystanders remarked with sneers that the music did not make them "feel good." They declared that they would never fight in favor of any cause represented by the flag. Yet it was only a few years ago when Indian Territory Negroes did fight bravely under that same flag.

Now the leaven of discontent and the smouldering spirit of race hostility have assumed real existence in the former territories. Statehood may alleviate matters outwardly for a time, but it is hardly reasonable to suppose that the old spirit of antagonism there, which has led the whites and Negroes to show their teeth, will be forgotten in a change of politics which has been effected by one party chiefly in its own interests. The Negroes, who naturally in this case cannot foresee much to their advantage in the present changes, may be expected to retire further and further into racial conservatism, and seclude themselves in increasing numbers in

surroundings that are more to their taste, away from districts that are not socially congenial to them. In this respect there appears some similarity between them and their Indian neighbors. Of course the whites are in no way sorry to see the Negroes segregated in remote districts as long as they do not have to come into direct contact with them. This seclusion may prove very satisfactory for a while to both parties but with the separation of interests and with increasing numbers and conservatism the gap will tend to widen, and the race question in the Indian Territory and Oklahoma will be more difficult to settle, whenever that question has to be settled. It seems quite evident that some new methods and ideas will have to be introduced somewhere to create a better mutual understanding between the races. The article by Dr. Franz Boas of Columbia University in Van Norden's Magazine, on the anthropological status of the Negro race, ought to be of value in presenting some generally little-known but fundamentally important facts to a public which has concerned itself somewhat one-sidedly with the political and social sides of a race problem.

The Negroes and the Creek Nation

This module is a republication of the following essay: Frank G. Speck. 1908. The Negroes and the Creek Nation. *Southern Workman* 37, no. 2: 106-110. Based on ethnographic field research undertaken in the Creek Nation, Indian Territory in 1904 and 1905, Speck's essay describes the history and present-day circumstances of the Creek Freedmen and other peoples of African American ancestry then living in the Creek Nation on the eve of Oklahoma Statehood. He generalizes about the status of African American peoples in the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole Nations on the basis of his observations among the Creeks and his travels throughout Indian Territory. Under U.S. copyright law, this essay is now in the public domain and is being republished on this basis.

It sometimes happens that two or more races of widely different physical and cultural characteristics blend together after a period of contact which is marked by amity instead of hostility. In South Africa, in the Soudan, in India, and in some parts of Asia, we find instances in historic times of mixed-blood communities, and even of mixed-blood tribes, the result of intermixture between the natives and foreign immigrants of entirely different extraction. So in North and South America there are numerous groups whose ancestry is derived from Negro and Indian, Indian and white, or Negro, Indian, and white sources. Some of these groups are known historically fairly well, and the gradual blending of blood and culture is a transparent affair in its various stages. This is the case in the Creek Nation of the former Indian Territory, where the opportunity for observing the traits of the mixed Negroes and Creek Indians is too favorable to be passed by.

The old Creek Nation itself was a loose confederacy of Indian tribes of the Maskogian linguistic stock. The avowed purpose of the coalition was to keep peace and to offer a front of strength against hostile neighbors. The tribes which composed it were of three or four linguistic families, but the majority were called Creeks and spoke dialects characterized by similarities in words, roots, and grammar, which are known collectively as Maskogian. When this tendency to join together for purposes of war or peace began we do not know, but the Confederacy was known to the southern colonists at a very early date. As a political body the confederacy or nation, as it was often called, was respected by the whites and treaties were made or broken

as the case might be, wars were levied and peace secured at different times during the last three centuries between it and the Government. The history of these inter-relations is too lengthy for the present paper, but a certain part of this history is necessary for introducing the period of first contact between the Creeks and the imported Negroes.

About the first notice that we have of the presence of the latter among the Indians is in 1798-99, when Colonel Benjamin Hawkins, an agent of the United States for Indian affairs, stated that at the time of his visit to the Creek town of Eufaula (Yufala) several of the Indians there possessed Negroes, presumably slaves. Hawkins informs us that some of the Negroes were taken during the Revolutionary War and others were given to the Creeks by the agents of Great Britain in payment for their services. It is further stated by Hawkins, who was interested in observing the economic conditions of the Creeks, that where the Negroes were there was more industry and the farms were better. He asserts, too, that the Negroes were all of them attentive and friendly to the white people, and he adds, with a touch of candor, particularly so to those in authority.

From this time on, it would seem, the number of slaves held by the Creeks increased. As the later physical and cultural traits of the Indians show, the relations between the two races must have been of a very intimate nature. In a like manner the Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles were recruiting their numerical strength by accessions of Negro slaves, and the same process of intermixture was going on among them as among the Creeks. Consequently what is found to have occurred in the way of acculturation among the latter holds generally for the others as well.

It is said among the descendants of these slaves today that the Indians were easy masters, and that the servitude of the Negroes was more like a form of hired service, where they were supported and protected by the Indians to whom in return they tendered their aid in agriculture and household labor. The fact that this nominal slavery among the Indians was an easy burden to the Negroes is attested to by the large number of escaped slaves who fled to the towns of the Indians during those times, only too willing to exchange their lot with a white master for one with a red-skinned lord.

We need only to observe what took place during the Seminole War, when Negro slaves and their mixed offspring played an important part in the ranks of the Indians. Even Osceola, the Seminole leader, is believed to have had Negro blood in his veins. Not only in matters of blood kinship, war, and industry was the amalgamation of the two strains producing results, but the mental attitude of the Indians was being changed by intimacy with the Negroes. While the latter had almost completely lost their old African culture under the stress of existence in bondage, there was nevertheless a certain underlying and unchanging stratum of thought and action which stood by them throughout. And these qualities were by daily contact producing a change in the life of the Creeks which went hand in hand with their change of blood. Just what the social relations between the Creeks and their slaves were at this time we do not know definitely. But judging from the results we can picture in our minds the at first bewildered Negro blankly observing the peculiar customs of his Indian master. Then we can see them laboring together or lounging together, during which time the Negro was making himself familiar with the language of the red man. Then, at a somewhat later period, when familiarity had lessened the gap between them and they had more interests in common, we can well imagine that more work and responsibility would be shifted upon the shoulders of the patient black by the capricious Indian.

It would indeed be somewhat presumptuous to attempt to say just what qualities the Negroes have given the Indians and what the Indians have given the Negroes. But after a short period of acquaintance with the modern Creeks it is not difficult to see some of the more prominent borrowed traits. In the first place it seems that the Creek gave to his Negro slave his language. Tenacity of language is an inherent trait of the Indian of the Creek Nation, and when other peoples desire to enter upon negotiations with him it must be in his language. The slaves then must almost immediately have been obliged to forget their own African tongue, together with their small stock of acquired English, and to learn thoroughly a native Indian language entirely different in structure from any with which they were acquainted. To this day, almost without exception, the Negroes who have been slaves to the Creeks, and who may not have Indian blood in their veins, speak Creek as fluently as they do English. Many of them, indeed, speak English poorly and with an Indian accent and idiom. This of course is naturally true of

those of mixed Indian and Negro blood. The younger generation, both among the freedmen and the mixed bloods, likewise adhere to the Creek language. The power which this linguistic accomplishment has given to the Negroes in the Creek Nation is considerable. By it they have been able to penetrate into chieftaincies and public official positions which have given them the open way toward the exercise of individual ambition or avarice. In the case of the latter, it might be said that the extent to which the freedman or mixed blood will go, to the detriment of the Indian's interests, is so largely a matter of individual aggressiveness that no general distinction can be made as to classes, whether they be Negroes (freedmen), mulattoes, Indian-Negroes, or Indian and white mixed-bloods. It is not impossible that the Negroes may have exerted some influence in modifying the Creek language, but on this point little can be said.

It has been supposed that in mythology the culture of the Creeks and other southeastern tribes has been subjected to modification by the Negroes. It is not the purpose here to discuss this matter but a mention of it is at least demanded. The nature of Creek mythology and folk-lore is rather peculiar in some respects when compared with the mythology and folk-lore of other North American tribes. Many mythical incidents and concepts of the Creeks are common and familiar elements in the mythologies of various other tribes and on this account must be regarded as native American material. But on the other hand there are frequently appearing mythical ideas which do not seem to harmonize with American mythology in general. These peculiarities may possibly be native and characteristic of Creek mythology. However, there are certain similarities which they present to native African mythology and hence the question arises whether to regard these anomalous elements as accidental similarities between American and African myths or to trace them indirectly to Africa through the imported Negro slaves. There has undoubtedly been some assimilation between Indian and Negro folk-lore but to what extent this process has gone in moulding the present form of Creek mythology it would be unwise at present to say.

As regards ceremonial and religious life the native Creek concepts and practices have suffered little change. We find today that the Negroes and mixed-bloods have adapted themselves readily to the Creek harvest ceremony in the absence of other religious activities, and many so-called

pagan Creeks who follow the old beliefs are of very dark skin and present physically more Negro than Indian features. In the ordinary customs of daily life and practice the Negroes and mixed-bloods of the nation show the characteristics of Creeks. Especially is this true of superstitions. On the other hand the Negroes have had the effect of minimizing the credulity and seriousness with which the Creeks regarded their native beliefs. The Negroes have shown the old practices of the Indians to them in a ridiculous light and so have been partially responsible for a break-down in native culture. Besides this, being more amenable to white influences than the Indians, they have been the entering wedge in the past century for many new ideas and new interpretations of old ones.

Cultural conditions and changes from a former state, brought about largely by the presence of Negroes, seem to divide the citizen inhabitants of the Creek Nation into several classes: the old full-blood conservative Indians with nearly all of their native attributes; the mixed Indian-Negroes who are conservative too and have become Indianized, so to speak; the progressive Indians and mixed-bloods who have become modernized; and the old Negro freedmen who hold themselves intact from both modern influences and Indian influences, preserving what is probably best represented by the "old plantation type." The second of these classes, roughly speaking, may be said to be the most numerous in the Creek Nation and the prospects are that this class will, in the course of time, predominate there. The social and economic outlook for this race amalgam is not by any means a bad one and if intelligent leaders among them can direct their steps in modern progress the mixed-blood Creeks, Choctaws, Seminoles, Cherokees, and Chickasaws of the new Oklahoma may well expect to become important factors in its development.

Notes on Creek Mythology

This module is a republication of the following essay: Speck, Frank G. 1909. Notes on Creek Mythology. *Southern Workman* 38, no. 1: 9-11. Based on ethnographic field research undertaken in the Creek Nation in 1904, 1905, and 1908, Speck's essay describes the major tale types and motifs characterizing the folklore and sacred narratives of the Creek people. Under U.S. copyright law, this essay is now in the public domain and is being republished on this basis.

In this brief paper a few general conclusions and comparisons in regard to the mythology of the Creek Indians, now of Oklahoma, formerly of Georgia and Alabama, will be given. It may be said in the beginning that the different tribes of the Muskogian linguistic stock present in every branch of life many similarities to each other, so that we can rightly speak, geographically, of a Southeastern culture area including all the Muskogian tribes and the others of this region in the one large group.[1] The non-Muskogian tribes of the Southeast; namely, Yuchi, Cherokee, and Catawba, appear to conform closely to the type in general culture and, as far as is known, the same similarity is found in their mythology.

The characteristics of Creek and Southeastern mythology, generally speaking, do not present anything decidedly different from what is commonly found all over the continent. Nor do there appear to be any very specialized types of myth here which might warrant the assumption of a different trend of development. In conformity with the usual American type we find the idea of the culture hero to be quite prominent among the Creeks. Then, in addition, there is the usual class of animal myths, with some particular animal playing the part of trickster. In the present case the culture hero and animal trickster are entirely separate and distinct figures. Besides these tales, there is a miscellaneous class comprising what might be called boy hero tales, animal incidents, hunters' tales, quasi-historical and short explanatory myths setting forth in a few sentences the purely arbitrary reasons why such and such things occur in the natural world, or why this or that is done by certain animals.

The incidents of these Creek and Southeastern myths may be cognated with those of many neighboring and many distant tribes. Sometimes only the

incidents resemble each other, sometimes only the characters in them, sometimes the motives, and sometimes all three elements appear cognate. Incidentally, it should be added, there are strong resemblances in some points between these American myths and European folk-tales, which similarities should not, of course, be attributed to any historical contact between the two areas. The underlying concepts in the actions of Creek mythology are unquestionably a part of the myth fabric of this continent. A few of the common Creek types which lend themselves favorably to classification and comparison will be given.

The genesis myth of the Creeks presents many similarities to that of neighboring tribes. Some divergences in detail, however, occur. As nearly everywhere, the Creeks conceive the universe to have been originally a waste of waters peopled by supernatural beings. From the depths of this ocean a little dirt was brought up by a crawfish who dived for it after several other animals had failed in the attempt. From this beginning the present earth was brought forth. The account of the animal diving for the earth is common to the Algonkin tribes northward from the Creeks, and it is also found in many distant American regions. Elsewhere we find variously the muskrat, beaver, duck, turtle, and frog, as the successful earth bringers.

Another widespread American myth which is also characteristic of the Creeks is that which relates how fire was stolen by some mythical animal and brought to this earth. The Creek version presents the rabbit as the securer of fire. He goes across a body of water to a people who are known to possess fire. There he steals it by mingling with the strangers in a dance and, at the proper moment, snatching an ember from their fire and escaping with it in his headband. There is hardly a region in America where some version of the Theft of Fire story is not to be found.

The type of myth known generally as the Magic Flight, is common in the Southeast. In this someone is being pursued by a monster or by an enemy. The speed of the pursuer is hindered by different objects which the pursued one flings behind as obstacles.

The incident of the foot race between a slow animal and a swift one, in which the latter is defeated, is also very general. This one is like the European tale of the Hare and the Tortoise. The Creek version has for its

characters Rabbit and Turtle, and instead of mere persistency winning the race it is strategy and deceit. The Turtle is cunning enough to know, or at least to assume, that the Rabbit is unable to discriminate between individuals of his family. So he stations relatives, one at the starting place and others at several points along the course, and himself hides at the goal. Of course the Rabbit is deceived along the race course and the Turtle is apparently at the destination before him. This tale is widely distributed over the continent without much variation in its general character.

The Tar-Baby type of story, the Negro version of which has been popularized by Joel Chandler Harris in "Uncle Remus," is another with a wide American and also African range. It seems to have been found in India and elsewhere besides. The Creek and Southeastern version starts with the Rabbit under warrant of arrest, so to speak, for theft. He is captured by the following strategy. A human figure or representation so constructed as to be adhesive to the touch is placed where the Rabbit will be likely to encounter it in passing by. When the Rabbit finds it he becomes offended and angrily orders it away, threatening to abuse it if he is not obeyed. Consequently Rabbit hits or kicks the figure and his limb sticks to it. This goes on until he is completely stuck to the dummy and made a prisoner. His subsequent method of escape is another very general myth element. When his captors are debating as to how they will kill him, the Rabbit makes a fearful outcry over the prospect of being thrown into the brush which, of course, is his natural shelter, and pretends that he prefers drowning or burning to any other fate. He succeeds in duping his captors who do throw him into the brush, and thus he escapes unhurt. This or a similar method of duping captors seems likely to be present in collections of myths from nearly every portion of the globe.

Again we have the story of the unfortunate child abandoned by his village. He is pitied by some supernatural being, and gifted with wonderful magic powers and an abundance of property. Later the people, who are by this time reduced to a deplorable state, return and are surprised to find the poor little boy now very rich and powerful. They are glad to receive his charity and to acknowledge him henceforth as their leader.

The story of how one creature tries in vain to imitate the magic of another has been styled the Imitation of the Host myth by American mythologists. It perhaps has the widest range and is subject to the least variation of any among American types of myth. For instance, Rabbit visits the Bear and sees him cut fat from his foot or side to cook dinner with. Rabbit then invites Bear to visit him in return for his hospitality, and then, to show off, tries to perform the same exploit that the Bear did. His attempt is, however, in vain and he only injures himself.

The story of a monster invulnerable save in one spot is another Creek story with an apparently universal Indian distribution. It corresponds in its chief idea to the Achilles myth in classical mythology. In the Creek account the monster is stone-covered and his only vulnerable spot is in his ear. The Rabbit informs the monster's enemies of the vulnerable ear and so the creature is killed. This myth has cognates in every direction on this continent. In some instances the monster is scale-clad, stone-clad, or metal-clad and in others simply magically invulnerable. The vulnerable spot, too, is variously located in the foot, nose, ear; or the monster's seat of life is only to be reached by magic weapons.

Lastly, we find a migration legend current among the Creeks. It gives in some detail an account of their wanderings before they settled in the Southeast, after crossing rivers and encountering strange peoples. Like the traditional accounts of migration prominent in the oral mythology of many other tribes it is unnecessary to regard this legend as anything more than a myth in its details. There is, though, nothing highly improbable in the mere idea of a historical migration.

Endnote

1. A study of the material and mental life of one of these Creek tribes was published by the writer as a memoir of the American Anthropological Society [sic. Association], Washington. D. C., under the title "The Creek Indians of Taskigi Town," Vol. II, Part 2. The myths referred to here may be found in full in that paper.

Missions in the Creek Nation

This module is a republication of the following essay: Frank G. Speck. 1911. Missions in the Creek Nation. *Southern Workman* 40, no. 4: 206-208. Based on ethnographic field research undertaken in the Creek Nation in 1904, 1905 and 1908, Speck's essay describes the history and consequences of Christian missionary activity among the peoples of the Creek Nation. The essay's wider focus is the nature of native cultural and social change under the uneven and often disruptive effects of contact with non-native people and American economic, political and social institutions. Under U.S. copyright law, this essay is now in the public domain and is being republished on this basis.

In recent years missionary work among the Indians and Negroes of the Creek Nation in Oklahoma has undergone a relapse. This comparison of conditions is between the present time and the period just before the Civil War. Fifty years ago the Creeks were largely Christianized, having gospels, primers, tracts, and other publications in their own language. The movement which produced this advance, however, gradually lost strength, resulting in conditions which I will now try to portray from an acquaintance of some seasons with the Indians and Negroes in the northwestern portion of the Creek Nation.

Though we have no direct means of knowing what the percentage of Christians among the Creeks is, nevertheless, to one who lives among them, it appears to be remarkably small. Judging from the Indians themselves the whole nation seems to have been recruited and then abandoned. This is manifested chiefly in the semblances of Christian ethics and beliefs which are current among the people, and, on the other hand, in the general absence of churches and religious organizations. So we find many Indians, and with them Negroes, who are apparently Christians in their tenets regarding ethics, but in other respects are out-and-out pagans. Also many of both races are neither Christian nor pagan and apparently owe no allegiance to any set of principles.

There are, however, a few of the old Indian congregations, largely Baptist and Methodist, which still continue to hold their own. Some of these are interesting to visit, as they retain many quaint characteristics. In the first

place, it should be mentioned that their creeds exert practically no influence upon the morals of the people as a whole. The congregations appear more like bodies of men and women organized to meet and sing hymns, and listen to the speeches of a leader. As in other matters the Indians and their Negro friends try to imitate the white people, so the church with its service has become an imitation of the perfunctory church in certain regions, where to be good mostly means to appear in church and wear good clothes. It is true, to be sure, that much religious fervor is shown at times by both Indian and Negro communicants.

In this country the Indians and Negroes mingle freely because when the Indians gave up their slaves, of which they held many before the Civil War, they gave them equal rights with themselves, socially as well as politically. To-day there are, in consequence, thousands of mixed-blood Negroes and Creeks who pass either as the one or the other. On the whole, these Creek-Negroes are greatly looked down upon, but it is questionable whether they deserve their reputation any more than do mixed bloods of other races. It is largely, I think, a question of social environment that is responsible for the conditions among the Negroes and mixed bloods of the Southwest. The Oklahomans like to call their camps new towns or "cities." One of these, a town some few months old, built (in 1908) in a region where over six hundred oil wells operate day and night and every day in the week, will serve as an illustration of the influences surrounding these half breeds. The camp was full of rough white men, who were there to make money quickly and for nothing else. A good time they had to have at any cost, and, having no families or ideas of permanency, they debauched themselves and spent their money in the wildest behavior. Indian and Negro women were naturally much in demand in such remote camps. So we find that among the natives, to whom this whole industrial movement is overwhelming, is set an example by what they consider a somewhat superior people — an example that is far below their native standards. Consequently the contact with white men, instead of bettering, degrades the natives. Now, when it is considered that many Oklahoma towns have originated and grown up under conditions much like those described, we may understand why the natives, whether Indian, Negro, or mixed, are not alive to higher moral ideas. The church organizations, being made up of native leaders and members, cannot be expected to raise themselves from conditions to which they are blind, and

the result is that they continue in stagnation, while the outsiders are left alone.

An illustration of this condition is to be seen in a certain little Indian and Negro church, known to the writer, where the members comprise Negroes, Yuchi Indians, and half-blood Creeks, whites and Negroes. Practically since their organization they have had no trained white leader; a Negro minister has done his best, which is far from good. The attendance is maintained as it would be at a club where weekly meetings furnish a little amusement in an otherwise dull community. Here the services are in English, a language poorly spoken understood by the Indians. Now, the point seems to be this, that the social environment of these early proselyted people, who have been abandoned in religious matters, has deteriorated with the incursions of whites into the country, and left them to their own inadequate resources, resulting in conditions which are really worse than if they had been left entirely to their native religion. There are some Indian communities which are not professedly Christian. Among them, where they are not molested by the whites, one finds high standards and really good conditions. Then there are some exemplary Christian Indian communities where conditions are equally good. These have apparently passed the critical period of change. They have their service in Indian, sing Indian hymns, and retain enough of their old life to suit the native requirements. Their native local culture has been a development of ages, which they have found by experience is best suited to their life. There is much in it that should be deliberately retained, even though this appear superfluous to the alien whites, who have only known the country for a couple of generations.

Last, and most numerous, are the thousands who, through contact with ridiculing white men, have no sympathy for the old native religion, and who, through the same influence, ridicule Christianity. This middle class is the one which makes the problem, and the evil which these people do is the fault of those who broke them away from the old order and abandoned them to an unassimilated new scheme. The lesson seems to be, either let the natives alone in the natural state of cultural simplicity which they have developed and enjoyed through countless ages, or else provide them with a permanently good and strengthening phase of culture in which the best elements of the new are blended with the best elements of the old. Only

under such conditions will the vital problems of the Indians, who form an important element in some parts of the country, find an easy and natural solution. This opinion is one shared extensively by level-headed Indians and by ethnologists.